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FAMILY TIES

A Recipe for Success

BY SUSAN E. MURRAY

Some parents wish for a recipe that will turn out just the right kind of kid. While there isn't a one-size-fits-all instruction book or recipe that works in every case, some things work better than others when it comes to developing healthy families.

While some eyes glaze over at the mention of research, and others fear research can lead them astray or is not useful, research is a way to increase our knowledge. That knowledge combined with our values, chosen life principles and attitudes all contribute to building better skills. This helps give confidence that we are moving in the right direction with our children.

For example, 50 years of developmental research has identified core family processes associated with healthy child development. A balance of parental warmth and structure is better than an imbalance in either extreme (Baumrind, 1967). Children learn to regulate their emotions in the context of supportive, emotion-focused parenting behaviors (Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1996). Unresolved parental fighting is more destructive than resolved parental fighting, but no fighting is better still (Davies & Cummings, 1994).¹

Every family is unique, and culture, race and gender need to be considered. But to ignore scientific evidence that has stood the test of time and sociological changes increases our risk of missing obvious ways to foster healthier relationships with our children, and with our families in general.

Let's consider Ellen White's counsel: "The home should be to the children the most attractive place in the world. ... Children have sensitive, loving natures. They are easily pleased and easily made unhappy. By gentle discipline, in loving words and acts, mothers [and fathers] may bind their children to their hearts." ... "Fathers [and mothers] should kindly, but firmly, guide the youth away from wrong desires. Fathers [and mothers] should not discourage their children."²

In addressing parental conflict, Ellen counseled, "Let the husband and wife study each other's happiness, never failing in



the small courtesies and little kindly acts that cheer and brighten the life."³ In specific counsel to a couple, she advised, "Do not try to compel each other to do as you wish. You cannot do this and retain each other's love. Manifestations of self-will destroy the peace and happiness of the home. Let not your married life be one of contention. If you do, you will both be unhappy. Be kind in speech and gentle in action, giving up your own wishes. Watch well your words, for they have a powerful influence for good

or for ill. Allow no sharpness to come into your voices. Bring into your united life the fragrance of Christlikeness."⁴

It is a myth that there are no user-friendly, dependable instructions for fostering healthy relationships and rearing healthy kids. First, there's the Bible. Ellen White's counsel is relevant yet today. There is evidence-based research. We have prayer, supportive friends and family, and knowledgeable professionals. We can build our skill set and develop more healthy attitudes and practices. The potential when combining all these resources can reap God's richest blessings and bring joy and happiness to our homes — a recipe for success!

Susan E. Murray is a professor emerita of behavioral sciences at Andrews University, certified family life educator, and licensed marriage and family therapist.

1. Diamond, Guy, "Returning Home: Reflections on Research in Family Therapy." *Family Therapy*, pp. 13(5), 14–19. American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, Inc.: Alexandria, Va. (September/October 2014).
2. White, Ellen G. "Home Influence." *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 388–391. Pacific Press: Nampa, Idaho (1942).
3. *Ibid.*, p. 393.
4. White, Ellen G., *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 7, pp. 47. Pacific Press: Nampa, Idaho (1948).